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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 000410

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [HU](#) [RO](#)  
SUBJECT: CLAMOR SURROUNDING ETHNIC HUNGARIAN FRINGE GROUP'S  
PLANNED DECLARATION OF "AUTONOMY"

REF: 05 BUCHAREST 2423

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Taplin  
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Ethnic Hungarian party (UDMR) leader and Deputy Prime Minister Bela Marko told the Ambassador on March 10 that Marko and his party do not support a March 15 ethnic Hungarian "autonomy proclamation," slated to occur in a small Transylvanian town. He predicted a small and peaceful event, although senior GOR officials insist they are worried about a violent confrontation. Marko expressed frustration, however, with the center-right government's failure to pass a draft law on minority status, blaming President Traian Basescu and his Democratic Party (PD) for the impasse. Basescu's advisers claim that they are angry the UDMR has not supported recent anti-corruption legislation. The UDMR is looking at the "big picture" -- EU Accession in 2007 -- and is unlikely to formally break with the center-right coalition. End Summary.

#### A Celebration in the Szekler Homeland

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12. (C) A tiny group of extremists within the ethnic Hungarian "Szekler" community has chosen March 15, the date Hungarians around the world commemorate the Revolution of 1848, to proclaim "autonomy" for the "Szekler land" region in Transylvania. However, mainstream ethnic Hungarian party (UDMR) leader and Deputy Prime Minister Bela Marko told the Ambassador March 10 that the UDMR has unequivocally disassociated itself from this endeavor. The event in question is slated to occur in the mid-sized Transylvanian town of Odorheiul Secuiesc, smack dab in the heartland of the Szekler minority. Marko stressed that he -- and the vast majority of Romania's ethnic Hungarians -- viewed March 15 as a sort of "Hungarian national pride" day without a specific political context. Marko stressed that since 1997 Romanian presidents and prime ministers had sent a congratulatory message to ethnic Hungarians every March 15.

13. (C) Marko stressed to the Ambassador that March 15 was "a big festival" for ethnic Hungarians of virtually all political stripes and that the vast majority of attendees at the March 15 event in Odorheiul Secuiesc would be there for a "celebration," not an overt political display. Marko stated that he, like most ethnic Hungarians, did not want March 15 "to be used for political purposes." He predicted that the event would transpire peacefully and without untoward incident, as the "organizers will be very careful." Marko recommended against a uniformed police presence in Odorheiul Secuiesc March 15, wryly opining that if one person "gets slapped" there would be a media uproar. (Note: A senior intelligence official told the Ambassador on March 9 that while the GOR was worried about the prospect of violence at

the event, it planned a "discreet" security presence. End Note.) Marko mentioned that he and the Hungarian Ambassador would attend and participate in another town's festival marking March 15.

¶4. (C) Marko told the Ambassador that, in his view, the proposed autonomy proclamation was an effort by a splinter group of radical Szeklers to thwart the political standing of the UDMR, which is a member of the governing center-right coalition. According to Marko's personal advisor Viktor Sata, the National Szekler Council (CNS), the party which is leading the move to proclaim autonomy March 15, has a membership of less than 2,000. (Note: About 1.5 million ethnic Hungarians live in Romania. End Note.) Marko characterized Odorheiul Secuiesc Mayor Jenő Szász as a man "with no values, only interests," focused exclusively on advancing his own political agenda. UDMR leaders, including Marko, predict a relatively modest turnout in Odorheiul Secuiesc, between 5,000 and 10,000 people. Marko did acknowledge that the opposition FIDESZ party in Hungary might be attempting to gain votes in the upcoming Hungarian elections by appealing to the more radical Szeklers, whose relatives live in Hungary.

¶5. (C) According to several ethnic Hungarian sources, the draft proclamation has not been finalized. Even the ethnic Hungarian senator representing Odorheiul Secuiesc told PolOff that he had "not seen" the proclamation. According to various sources, the proclamation may be either a relatively straightforward list of demands for greater civil liberties and cultural protections for ethnic-Hungarians in the Szekler region or an outright "declaration of independence." Odorheiul Secuiesc Mayor and CNS leader Jenő Szász told EmbOff that the Szekler minority is "tired of waiting" and

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impatient with what he described as Romanian bureaucratic indifference. He asserted that ethnic minorities in other countries achieved results through "active resistance."

¶6. (C) The planned Odorheiul Secuiesc autonomy proclamation might have gone largely unnoticed on the national scene but for Corneliu Vadim Tudor's extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM), always ready to fan the flames of ethnic unrest. In recent days, the PRM has called for a counter-demonstration of 100,000 Romanians in Odorheiul Secuiesc on March 15. Marko dismissed as hyperbole the possibility of Tudor staging a massive rally there, noting that the region is "almost entirely ethnic Hungarian" and that, in any case, Tudor would not receive an assembly permit from Mayor Szász. Nonetheless, Tudor's vitriolic denunciation of the proposed autonomy declaration has received wide press coverage.

Against a Background of Partisan Politics...

¶7. (C) During the meeting with the Ambassador, Marko acknowledged that relations between the UDMR and President Basescu's Democratic Party (PD) were at a low ebb. Echoing observations made by other UDMR leaders, Marko stated that his party -- and the ethnic Hungarian constituency -- was frustrated that the PD had failed to deliver on its promise to pass a law giving "cultural autonomy" to regions with a majority of ethnic Hungarians (Ref). Marko stressed that when the UDMR ended its alliance with the PSD and joined the center-right alliance in late 2004, the center-right Alliance promised the passage of a cultural autonomy law as the key condition for the UDMR entry into the alliance. Marko underscored to the Ambassador that, within the center-right coalition, only the PD opposes the UDMR's proposed legislation. According to Marko, the other two coalition partners, the National Liberal Party (PNL) and Conservative Party (PC), back the UDMR's proposed legislation.

¶8. (C) Marko told the Ambassador that Basescu and his party opposed the draft legislation on purely political grounds, in

order to gain traction with nationalist voters. (Note: Earlier this week, Marko publicly denounced Basescu for attempting to "improve his popularity through nationalistic rhetoric." End Note.) The Ambassador stated that he had heard reports that Basescu might travel to Odorheiul Secuiesc March 15. Marko rejoined that he had not heard Basescu was planning on attending, adding that his presence there would add to tension and would be a "big mistake." Marko asked the Ambassador to urge Basescu to support the proposed minority law and also to urge the Romanian president to refrain from traveling to Odorheiul Secuiesc. The Ambassador promised to discuss these issues with the Romanian president during a planned meeting March 13.

¶9. (C) Marko told the Ambassador that the UDMR would "not quit the coalition at this time because EU accession on January 2007 is our biggest priority." He opined that the political tumult that would result from the UDMR's withdrawal from the coalition, ending the center-right alliance's parliamentary majority, would create political instability that would, in turn, put January 2007 EU accession in jeopardy. Nonetheless, Marko noted, without elaborating, that a "very droll situation" would result if a suitable law on minority status does not eventually pass.

¶10. (C) Presidential Domestic Policy Adviser Claudiu Saftoiu told visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary Mark Pekala and DCM March 8 that Basescu was in fact considering the possibility of showing up in Odorheiul Secuiesc March 15, although Saftoiu did not elaborate on why Basescu might go or what he might seek to accomplish. Saftoiu stated that Basescu and his senior advisers concluded that the UDMR had "retaliated" when the draft law on cultural autonomy failed to pass by refusing to support recent anti-corruption and judicial reform legislation. Saftoiu suggested the real reason for the UDMR's reticence reflected the fact that "the UDMR has been in power for ten years" under various governments and included many "corrupt leaders" who feared effective anti-corruption laws. Prosecutors, he suggested, should actively investigate some of them.

¶11. (C) Comment. The UDMR is the only ethnic Hungarian party (or ethnic party of any stripe), which has obtained the five percent threshold required for entry into Parliament. The vast majority of Hungarians have no truck with the tiny CNS or its radical demands. That said, what might have been a little-noticed local event in an obscure Transylvanian town could conceivably become a flash point for the tensions among

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Basescu, his erstwhile coalition partner the UDMR, and the followers of extreme nationalist Vadim Tudor. As emotional as some of our GOR contacts have been in recent days in expressing their fear of an ugly confrontation at the March 15 event, our assessment at the moment is that there has been at least as much political theater as sober thinking applied by Cotroceni and the intelligence agencies. EC Delegation head Scheele, who spoke to Ambassador on March 10 after a meeting with Basescu, agrees and generally discounts the chances of a major flare-up next week among Szeklers and Romanian nationalists. Bela Marko is resolutely looking at the big picture, even as he angles for a more favorable position on the minorities legislation. UDMR leaders have told us that Romania's EU entry represents the best possible outcome for Romania and ethnic Hungarians. They, at least, have no intention of sabotaging Romania's 2007 EU accession chances by provoking a political crisis. End Comment.

¶12. (C) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNet website:  
[www.state.gov.gov/p/eur/bucharest](http://www.state.gov.gov/p/eur/bucharest)  
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